Second Assembly of the World Council of Churches
Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois, U.S.A.
1954

SOCIAL QUESTIONS— THE RESPONSIBLE SOCIETY IN A WORLD PERSPECTIVE

An Ecumenical Survey
prepared under the auspices of the
World Council of Churches

HARPER & BROTHERS, Publishers, New York

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NOTE

This edition of the Surveys is intended to provide background information for the Assembly participants on the six subsidiary topics.

Comments on the Surveys, and supplementary source material, are welcome and may be sent to:

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GENERAL PREFACE

The ecumenical and missionary movements of our time are converging in the conviction that the whole Church is commissioned to bring the whole Gospel to the whole world. In intercession and mutual aid, in concerted endeavors of thought and action, the churches are beginning to grow together as members of the one body. They are realizing the meaning of solidarity—solidarity with sister-churches in need, with men in distress. They are engaging in the difficult art of learning from one another.

Growth in fellowship and in imaginative understanding of common needs and common tasks, however, does not come by itself. It involves knowledge of the facts of the Christian world scene. It involves the ability to see and to appraise the situation of one's own Church in the context of the Church Universal.

The present series of ecumenical Surveys should provide both an instructive and inspiring source of information for every person who is, or ought to be, concerned with Christian world affairs. In these documents a rather unusual attempt has been made to ascertain the general patterns of thought and action that seem to emerge in the manifold battlefronts, forward movements, and also failures and weaknesses, of ecumenical Christendom today. The immediate purpose of their preparation has been to provide background information for the Second Assembly of the World Council of Churches at Evanston, Illinois, U.S.A., August, 1954. But since they present a conspectus of areas of church life which are of continuing and, indeed, growing importance, it is hoped that they will remain useful for years to come as guidebooks that open up wider horizons for the Christian advance.

The program of the Evanston Assembly encompasses an exceptional range of subjects, each of which presents issues of the most immediate urgency and import for man's life today. It is focused on the great affirmation of faith:

CHRIST—THE HOPE OF THE WORLD

In this overarching perspective it seeks to illumine the problems and responsibilities confronting the contemporary Church in six particular fields:

Faith and Order—Our Oneness in Christ and Our Disunity as Churches.

Evangelism—The Mission of the Church to Those outside Her Life.

Social Questions—The Responsible Society in a World Perspective.

International Affairs—Christians in the Struggle for World Community.

Intergroup Relations—The Church Amid Racial and Ethnic Tensions.

The Laity—The Christian in His Vocation.

The Central Committee of the World Council, when laying the groundwork at its meeting in 1951, asked the Study Department Committee to assume responsibility for the co-ordination and supervision of the study preparations. An Advisory Commission on the Main Theme, appointed by the Central Committee and consisting of some thirty Christian thinkers widely representative of different churches and theological outlooks, has held three annual meetings and produced a report for discussion by the Assembly. In 1952 the Central Committee appointed a Preparatory Commission for each of the six other topics, to consider the questions demanding particular attention by the Assembly and to produce three documents: an Introductory Leaflet for general study within the churches; a descriptive Survey of recent thought and activity of the churches in its field; and a Working Paper to be submitted to

the corresponding Assembly Section as a starting point for its deliberations. The Surveys thus take the place of the volumes of essays, published in connection with the First Assembly at Amsterdam in 1948.

In their present form the Surveys are the outcome of an extensive program of fact-finding and of consultation with denominational and interdenominational agencies and individual correspondents in many lands. During well over a year, the officers of the Commissions and the Study Department staff have been engaged in the complicated and often baffling task of collecting and digesting source data. The responses to the questionnaires and queries which were sent out have been uneven, both in quantity and in quality. The process has revealed how inadequately equipped the churches still are when it comes to investigating, and realistically assessing, facts and trends in their own situation. Yet, judging from the wealth of statements and reports received (some of them well deserving separate publication in full), it would appear that the usefulness of such synoptic, ecumenical surveys has been fully recognized.

Drafts of the Surveys were scrutinized and partly revised at meetings of the Commissions held in or near Geneva in August, 1953. On the instruction of the Commissions, final editing was subsequently undertaken by officers and staff, who in several instances faced the painful task of drastically reducing valuable material in order to keep within the allotted limits of Space. Time has not permitted resubmission of the present texts to the members of each Commission concerned for approval.

It is appropriate to acknowledge here the great debt of thanks which is due to all those who in various ways have shared in this co-operative venture—the many contributors of source materials; the officers and members of the Preparatory Commissions; the substitutes and consultants who attended the meetings of the Commissions in August, 1953, when the draft Surveys were discussed; and last but not least the members of the Study Department Committee.

This account of the manner in which the Surveys have been produced will make it evident that they may not be taken as expressing the position of the World Council of Churches on the matters under review. Rather, they are intended to present background material for the Assembly. Such value and authority as they possess is intrinsic. It lies in the measure in which they acutely discern the facts and signs of the Christian world scene, lift major issues into prominence, and thus offer signposts for the pilgrim Church.

HENRY P. VAN DUSEN, *New York*
Chairman of the Study Department Committee
NILS EHRENSTRÖM, *Geneva*
Director of the Study Department

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I

INTRODUCTION

The theme for the Assembly at Evanston is the Christian Hope, and it is one of the assumptions of the special commission which has defined the meaning of this theme, that the Christian must be concerned not only with the hope of ultimate redemption but also with the hope for a better society within history. As the Advisory Commission on the Theme of the Second Assembly stated in its first report:

> It is the task of the Church to show how the Lordship of Christ as the hope for the world is meaningfully related to every aspect of the world situation and the human predicament. . . . To the hungry and the poor, to those in bondage and social disorder, the Church must be the servant of that Lord Who healed all manner of diseases and proclaimed liberty to the captives. As Christians we must support every effort of peoples and individuals to still their hunger, to gain the respect of their fellowmen, and to achieve the full stature of their manhood.

This survey reviews the efforts of the churches and individual Christians to interpret and act upon the economic and social problems of our time.

The three great ecumenical conferences dealing with social questions: Stockholm (1925), Oxford (1937), and Section III of the First Assembly of the World Council of Churches, Amsterdam (1948), have all emphasized two fundamental points regarding the Christian attitude toward society: (1) Christians must work for social justice, and (2) no particular political or economic system can be identified with the Will of God or equated with the Kingdom of God. These have been the keynotes of ecumenical social thinking.

In the conference at Amsterdam they were expressed in

the declaration that the "churches in all lands" must work for the goal of "the responsible society," and it was explained that:

> For a society to be responsible under modern conditions it is required that the people have freedom to control, to criticise and to change their governments, that power be made responsible by law and tradition, and be distributed as widely as possible through the whole community. It is required that economic justice and provision of equality of opportunity be established for all the members of society.

In relation to the most important contemporary social issues, attempts were made at each conference to suggest the specific implications of these points for action by Christians in society. After the Amsterdam conference the Study Department of the World Council of Churches began an inquiry on *Christian Action in Society* to stimulate further an exchange of views on social questions among the churches, to obtain information about the social issues confronting the Church in different countries and to develop the meaning of the Responsible Society in relation to such issues.

The present Survey attempts to do three things: (1) to give a general picture of the world situation in which the churches have been living over the past few years, (2) to describe the social problems which have faced the churches in specific regions and countries, and (3) to report on the varying attitudes and activities of the churches in relation to these problems. A final section attempts to draw from these reviews some conclusions regarding the tasks of the churches today. Space has not permitted the exhaustive treatment of any of these topics which would be desirable, and it has been necessary in many cases to omit much valuable specific material and to concentrate on certain situations and approaches which may be regarded as typical.

II

THE WORLD SOCIAL REVOLUTION

Christian social responsibility today must be seen against the background of a vast world upheaval marked by the decline of old social and economic ideologies and institutions, the social effects of continued rapid technical change, the complete shake-up of old patterns of life in Asia, Africa and Latin America, the increasing economic and political interdependence of nations, and the effects of the continuing struggle between the communist and noncommunist countries.

One social era is passing away and a new one is being born, and the result is radically new tasks and opportunities for Christian witness and service. The purpose of this opening chapter is to survey some of the basic changes which have taken place in recent decades and which determine the dimensions in which Christian social responsibility must be conceived, today and during the coming years.

A. The Decline of Classical Capitalism

One of the important developments of recent decades is the rapid decline of *laissez-faire* capitalism as the dominant economic conception of the Western industrial countries. By this is meant not a decline in capitalistic techniques or in the practical importance of privately owned commercial and financial institutions (for indeed in Western Europe and the U.S.A. these have actually grown in size and importance), but rather the displacement of the *laissez-faire* idea that economic activities should be regarded as autonomous activities. As one writer has said, "The twentieth century . . . is witnessing on a widespread scale the disappearance of the economic

autonomy of the capitalist era." We are eyewitnesses to "a great reversal of all the tendencies which made for the independence of economic activity from the total demands of society and from ethics."[1] Increasingly during the last several decades economic activities have been subordinated to non-economic requirements.

Various motives have led to the subordination of the free market system—economic justice, the restoration of responsible community life, and the desire of people to be in control, as far as possible, of the social and economic conditions in which they live.[2] There has been an enormous change in recent decades in thinking on the duty of the community in relation to economic life. The community has had to intervene to protect the rights of weaker parties; moreover, the formulation of natural rights which are regarded as conditions of well-being in modern life has come to include the right to subsistence, to health, security and housing, and to employment.

The responsibility of the democratic state to provide as a matter of right for its citizens security against unemployment, sickness and old age, and to control and plan the use of national resources so as to maintain work for all and ensure a fair distribution of income between different sections of the community, is a principle which is accepted in one form or another in almost all the industrial nations of Western Europe and North America.

What questions does this development raise for the churches of the ecumenical movement? In the past they have consistently challenged certain tendencies in capitalist economic thought and organization, rejecting the liberal ideology of the harmony of interests underlying it, and rejecting also the tendency to view production as an end in itself rather

[1] V. A. Demant, *Religion and the Decline of Capitalism*, ch. 1. See also Denys Munby, "Moral Problems in the Economic Situation Today" (mimeographed), a document published by the Study Department, World Council of Churches, 1952, 32 pp.

[2] V. A. Demant, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

than as a means to serve man. The report on the Economic Order, prepared at the Oxford Conference on Church, Community and State (1937), pointed to dangers in capitalism—the concentration of wealth, the growth of the large urban masses which in industrial society were the victims of irresponsible economic power, the tremendous waste of productive power in business depressions, the treatment of "human labor as a commodity, to be bought at the lowest possible price and to be utilized to the greatest possible extent."[3] The "enhancement of acquisitiveness," the "inequalities," the "irresponsible possession of economic power," the "frustration of the sense of Christian vocation" due especially to unemployment, all these were cited as "points at which the Christian understanding of life is challenged [by the capitalist economic system.]"[4] There are areas of the world where these criticisms still apply, but in many countries these specific social evils have been substantially alleviated through social reform. In thinking about economic issues today the Church must face issues of a different order.

It will be one of the main purposes of the survey to see how the churches are redefining and reinterpreting their function in society in relation to the new social conditions which arise from the decline of capitalism and the growth of tendencies in the direction of the social welfare state.

B. The Reformulation of Socialism

A second new factor in the social situation today, closely related to the first, and which also radically alters the problem of Christian social thought and action, is the "de-Utopianizing" and the "de-Marxizing" of socialism. This development is important in view of the extent to which Christian attitudes to social problems have in the past been formulated,

[3] *The Churches Survey Their Task*: Report, Oxford Conference on Church, Community and State (1937), Allen and Unwin, London, 1937, pp. 100-102.

[4] *Ibid.*, pp. 104-9.

especially in Europe, specifically either in opposition to or in sympathy with the ideals and the program of socialism. On the one hand, the movement toward Christian political parties and Christian trade unions, at least on the continent, was in large part based upon opposition to the atheism and materialism of socialism. On the other hand, in many countries the movement for Social Christianity has frequently been based upon the idea that socialism was the practical expression of Christian faith.

At Oxford and at Amsterdam the churches consistently opposed the contention of socialist theory that socialization of property would inevitably solve all problems. Thus in the report of Section III at Amsterdam it was stated:

> In the light of the Christian understanding of man we must . . . say to the advocates of socialisation that the institution of property is not the root of the corruption of human nature. We must equally say to the defenders of existing property relations that ownership is not an unconditional right; it must, therefore, be preserved, curtailed or distributed in accordance with the requirements of justice.[5]

Today, however, socialist thinking largely accepts this view.

The extent to which basic principles are being reconsidered is illustrated in reports published by various socialist study groups especially in Britain but also in Europe and Asia. One such group in Britain has referred to the "central belief . . . that through some form of collectivism the just and good society would be established" as "a Creed of Yesterday."[6] It is acknowledged that the assumptions of economic determinism and the inevitability of progress have been seriously weakened by the events of two great wars and the experience with totalitarian governments.

In general we have seen that a desire for power for its own sake may have a greater influence on social change than economic inter-

[5] *The Church and the Disorder of Society*: Report of Section III, First Assembly of the World Council of Churches, 1948.

[6] *Socialism, a New Statement of Principles,* Socialist Union, London 1952, pp. 13-14.

ests. The influence which unscrupulous politicians can exercise over the masses obviously rests on more elusive and complicated psychological factors than can be accounted for by a rigid economic interpretation of history.[7]

Although democratic socialists still draw their inspiration from a faith in the capacity of the human will and social conscience to liberate men from exploitation and other social evils, they are radically revising their views of the fundamental human situation. One of the leading theoreticians of the British Labour Party writes in *The New Fabian Essays*:

The evolutionary and revolutionary philosophies of progress have both proved false. Judging by the facts, there is far more to be said for the Christian doctrine of original sin than for Rousseau's fantasy of the noble savage, or Marx's vision of the classless society.[8]

[7] *Ibid.* p. 19.

[8] *The New Fabian Essays,* ed. by R. H. S. Crossman, with preface by the Rt. Hon. C. R. Attlee, Turnstile Press, London, 1952, p. 8. Author's italics.

Only British socialist thinking has been cited, but in many other countries socialist groups are rethinking their basic principles. Cf. the Declaration of the Socialist International meeting in Frankfurt/Main on July 3, 1951, on *Aims and Tasks of Democratic Socialism,* in which it is argued that socialists can base their concern for social justice on religious beliefs and need not be Marxists.

The Planning Committee of the Netherlands Socialist Party has published a report, *De Weg naar Vrijheid* (*The Road to Freedom*), Amsterdam, 1951, which outlines the objectives of the party in the coming years in terms which suggest a recasting of fundamental theory similar to that which is taking place in Britain.

A similar, though less striking, development is reported in socialist thinking in Germany and Sweden. A German Marxist writes: "We no longer have one-track minds in explaining social events. We have realised that social forces are not all derived from a single primary force, but that they are interdependent. . . . So today it is no longer possible to explain the course of history in such a way that the development of the conditions of production is the only decisive factor for determining the course of social life in history." (From a statement on *Sozialismus und Marxismus,* by Dr. Gerhard Weisser, (mimeographed, 1947).

And Mr. M. M. Thomas has shown that in Asia also socialism as an ideology is undergoing a transformation attempting to hold on to what is true in liberalism, Marxism and Gandhism, and rejecting what is false in them. ("The Responsible Society in India," by M. M. Thomas, *Indian Journal of Theology,* Nov., 1952.)

The new emphasis of socialists on preserving the creative freedom of the individual and on the responsible use of power in the modern state, and the felt need for a new theory of the place of man in society represent a great change in socialist thinking compared with the years before the war. It means a new opportunity to confront such groups with the Christian understanding of man and society, provided Christians can translate their insights into language of social and political thought and action. How does this opportunity present itself in different countries and what is the response of the Church?

C. The Inadequacy of the "Isms": New Dimensions of the Social Problem

The decline of *laissez-faire* capitalism and Marxist socialism[9] does not mean the end of the need for social change. On the contrary, there is at present a desire for fundamental change in social conditions which is deeper and more far-reaching than at any previous moment in world history.

The struggle for justice in Europe, Asia and Africa is increasingly conceived today not in terms of economic or political ideologies but in terms of such goals as respect for the individual, fellowship, equal sharing of burdens and opportunities, the abolition of unjustified privilege and the correction of various social evils which are no longer regarded as unavoidable necessities.

[9] The term "Marxist socialism" as used here refers mainly to the socialist movements in Western Europe and in Anglo-Saxon countries, not to the Russian communist system as such. The socialist movements of the West very frequently were Marxist only in the sense that they made use of the Marxist view of progress and social determinism. Disenchantment with the Russian communist system as the basis of the hope for a better society is very widespread in the West, and has undoubtedly contributed to the disillusionment with socialist theory generally. Those hoping for radical social change see Russian communism as the perversion of the social revolution rather than as a means to implement it. See, for example, *The Christian in the World Struggle,* by M. M. Thomas and J. D. McCaughey, a Grey Book of the World's Student Christian Federation, Geneva, 1951.

The desire for a fundamental rethinking of the goals of political and economic life is characteristic especially of the situation in Europe. Something more decisive than the construction of a socialist or a capitalist Europe is at stake. Many people have lost confidence in the national state dominant in the past. There is a search for a new Europe. What is being sought is a society which expresses through its institutions a concern for the individual man and which affords him both the security and the freedom for responsible living. Everything is being judged according to whether or not it serves these ends.

But it is not only the depth but the breadth of the social change which is significant today. In a way not known in the past the consideration of social responsibility today involves thinking in world terms. A United Nations "Preliminary Report on World Social Conditions" emphasizes that:

> To an extent which might have seemed inconceivable even fifty years ago, there has come increasing recognition that 2,400 million people have somehow to contrive to live together, and share together the resources of the earth; that the general impoverishment of any area is a matter of concern to all areas; and that the technical experience and knowledge acquired in rapidly changing industrialised societies have somehow to be made available to those communities that are less advanced and less well-equipped. That this has come to pass is an historical and inspiring fact. Indeed, it has been suggested by a distinguished historian that in the broad sweep the 20th Century will be chiefly remembered in future centuries not as an age of political conflicts or technical inventions, but as an age in which human society dared to think of the welfare of the whole human race as a practicable objective.[10]

The economic and social condition of the underdeveloped countries has raised the need for radical social action on a world-wide scale. The countries of Africa, Asia, the Middle East and South America together comprise two thirds of the

[10] *Preliminary Report on the World Social Situation,* United Nations Economic and Social Council, April, 1952, p. 1 (mimeographed edition).

world's population and the vast majority of the world's oppressed and impoverished peoples. Radical improvements in health, food, work, housing and education are needed, and these involve not only new economic and political institutions, but a radically new understanding of individual and social responsibility and a new conception of human relations in the home, the factory, the village and the city.

Success in the creation of new societies in Asia, Africa, the Middle East and Latin America is vital for the welfare of the world. As an expert on Asian problems has written,

> The struggle for a new society in Asia is undoubtedly *the* great issue which confronts humanity in this decade. A fire has been started in Asia which will either burn or warm the whole world in the second half of this century. The problems are economic and social as well as spiritual and political.[11]

The revolutionary situation of the underdeveloped countries is especially a challenge to old patterns of Christian social concern. In the past Christian social thinking has not given adequate attention to the social problems of the non-Western world, in consequence partly, perhaps, of a curious division of functions between "missions" and "social action" in the development of the different branches of the ecumenical movement. But it is obvious today that this division is intolerable and that efforts to develop a united missionary, evangelistic and social witness must be speeded up. How urgently do the churches see this problem?

D. The Concern of the Churches with Social Problems: Some General Remarks

Speaking generally of the Church around the world, it is now more widely accepted than in the past that the Christian ought to be concerned with social issues and that the guidance of Christian thinking in relation to them ought to

[11] De Vries, "The Churches and the Economic and Social Problems of South and South-East Asia," in *The Ecumenical Review*, April, 1953.

be one of the central concerns of the Church. For Christians in many countries the experiences of the last two decades have irrefutably confirmed the views of the Ecumenical Conference on Life and Work at Oxford in 1937 that "the Church and the world are indissolubly connected," that "it is part of the very essence and mission of the Church to carry responsibility for the welfare of man," that the churches must develop "a common body of Christian criteria and assumptions on social questions" to be able to meet the challenge confronting them in the modern world.[12] More and more today the argument on the social witness of the Church is not, as in the past, *whether* the Church has a responsibility in society, but *what* precisely that responsibility is, and *how* it can best be realized.

The greater awareness of Christian social responsibility must, however, be considered in relation to reports from certain countries which indicate widespread apathy toward social questions. The following report describes an attitude which is probably typical of the situation in many churches:

> Speaking generally, it appears that the rank and file of Christians here are not actively concerned with the contribution to be made by the Christian faith and ethics in the development of the free and responsible society. Many are not even aware of the issues. Some are opposed on principle to the Church's taking any responsibility in the wider community because they feel her concern is wholly with the spiritual life of her members and with strictly ecclesiastical matters. . . . Official bodies and spokesmen of the churches have given leadership, cautious but often far-seeing and well-considered. If the laity has been content to relegate responsibility to the clergy this is probably because the positions taken by men with time and training to consider these matters are too far outside the usual range of thinking of the general membership, and effective means have not been devised to bridge the gap and to explain and justify the Church's concern with such matters.[13]

[12] *The Churches Survey Their Task.*

[13] This and other quotations not otherwise specified are from the unpublished reports submitted for the preparation of this Survey.

It is explained, however, that this attitude manifests not only the traditional apathy and indifference of many Christians. It is due also to the fact that the crucial issues which gave rise to Christian social concern in the past have, especially in Western countries, been mitigated by reform. The achievement of a high degree of economic prosperity and stability in many Western industrial countries in the postwar years has undercut efforts to arouse concern for social issues.

The general acceptance of the Christian social objectives of the past coupled with disillusionment about certain aspects of the welfare society has led to the "slackening of intensity" in Christian concern for such issues and has even brought about the "collapse" of the Christian social movement in some countries.

The most significant new thinking about the task of the Church in society may, in the future, come from the Church in Europe, in the communist-dominated countries and in the underdeveloped countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America. In all these countries the Church is living in the midst of great social pressures and dangers, and it is in varying degrees responding to its opportunities and duties with new courage and inspiration.

The development of the Church's social witness has been especially significant in some countries of Western Europe, so much so that there is ground for reversing the historic contrast between the American and the European churches with regard to social concern. The new "activism" of the European churches was noticed by some observers at Amsterdam and judging by the reports for this survey it has continued to develop since. It was put most clearly by Reinhold Niebuhr in a report on the Amsterdam Assembly:

> The old contrast between American activism and continental quietism has disappeared completely. The European churches awakened to their social responsibilities in the last tragic decade. In doing so they have become considerably more radical than most American churches. With this radical (generally socialist) political

conviction they combine an eschatological note, an insistence on the final triumph of Christ over sin, evil and death, no matter what may happen in the next year, or decade, or century. This note of New Testament faith was found very baffling by many Americans who thought it connoted irresponsibility toward the pressing problems of the world. Indeed it was expressed in words which seemed to suggest the possibility of human beings achieving a kind of timeless serenity, which had no concerns with this world. Yet the same men who baffled us with such words insisted that the Church was much too sentimental in dealing with problems of political justice. It found some of the Anglo-Saxon devotion to such matters as the human rights declaration of the United Nations quite irrelevant in the light of the more pressing decisions confronting the world.[14]

In the following chapters there is an attempt to show the new patterns of the churches' response to the problems of the social order in particular countries and regions.

[14] *Union Seminary Quarterly Review,* Nov., 1948, p. 14.

III

TRENDS IN GREAT BRITAIN

The most important fact about the social teaching of the churches in Britain is that social changes brought about in the years since the war have largely fulfilled the objectives for which Christians worked for many years. The social movement which many people in Britain would associate with the name of Archbishop William Temple has seen its aims to a great extent achieved by the welfare state and the postwar reforms. This general acceptance by society of the ends which Christians had set before themselves has led to uncertainty and doubt as to the future of the social teaching of the churches.

The uncertainty which characterizes the political situation is thus described in a report from Britain:

> The election of 1950 marked the end of an era of reforms. The success of the Labour Party in putting on to the statute book a series of radical reform measures as promised in 1937 and further affirmed in 1945 ended an epoch, both of socialist thinking and of clearly marked ideals. By 1950 the shame of inter-war history in Britain had been finally wiped out by measures which decisively consolidated the wartime changes and enacted a number of long necessary reforms, such as the nationalisation of the railways, public utilities and coal-mines, some of which had long existed in other countries. For those not blinded by wishful thinking or traumatic experience of pre-war days, a new period was to be entered upon, with no clear moral choices and no easy victories to be gained by redistributing income or making use of unemployed resources.

The same report points to the role of the Church in relation to the political situation created by the "end of an era of reforms":

The new period is . . . accompanied by the narrowing of the divergent policies of the two political parties, and the narrow electoral difference between them. Thus the apparently bitter political skirmishing hides an incapacity to think out fresh policies appropriate to the times, a disease of both political parties. The great need is for rethinking of fundamentals in politics, and the Church could (in theory) be a great stimulus, and is provided with a tremendous opportunity.

How far is the Church meeting the new situation and the new opportunities? On the one hand, many of the old bodies that were influential in creating the social movement are no longer entirely appropriate to the new situation, and feel themselves in somewhat of an impasse. Thus Maurice Reckitt, one of the leaders of the "Christendom Group," which has had a great influence on the social thought of the Church of England, summing up the present influence of the group writes, "But we are now in the fifties, and the picture is very different [from the twenties]. . . . [We have failed] to respond to the needs of the latest age . . . and to meet with a new initiative the very different postwar circumstances."[1] The same might be said about some others of the formerly important centers of Christian social thought and action.

There is an increasing realization of the need to strengthen the foundation of belief as a basis for rethinking Christian social theory and Christian discipleship in social and economic life in Britain. With some this takes the form of direct evangelism, a proclamation of the Christian Gospel in terms familiar to the Church but seeking new and more effective techniques. Others are seeking a fuller understanding of the new social and economic issues which have arisen from the industrial, social security and welfare measures enacted since the end of the war, with a view to discerning the religious and theological factors involved and thereby beginning afresh the working out of Christian social ethics. There has also

[1] M. B. Reckitt, "Challenge and Response," in *Theology*, June, 1953, p. 212.

been a significant move in responsible groups in industrial life seeking the guidance of Christian people and of the Church in grappling with their new problems of purpose for industry and motivation for work.

A. The Emphasis on the Laity

In formulating Christian ethics in relation to particular issues the emphasis is increasingly on the experience and insights of laymen as the basis of a realistic and relevant ethic. This approach involves the co-operation of laymen and theologians but the pattern for such co-operation has not yet been fully developed.

Moreover, the organized churches still have too slender a contact with working-class organizations, with industry and political movements, and, in consequence, there is too little systematic discussion between theologians and those who are immersed in political and economic life. This need is outlined as follows in one of the reports received:

> What is needed is both elucidation of the fundamentals of our political and economic life and detailed analysis of the proximate steps to be taken and concrete things to be done. Both parts of the analysis can be undertaken only in relation to study and understanding of the complex situation in which we find ourselves. . . . What is wanted is not merely greater concern with social issues, though that is always welcome, but the proper organisation of that concern to make the best use of experts and theological minds.

The churches have been more successful in grappling with certain types of social problems of a practical nature. They have been actively concerned with a variety of issues, especially where the responsibility of Christians in local community action is involved or where problems of personal ethics are concerned.[2]

[2] Some of the publications issued by the churches and Christian movements indicate the range of interests. The Church of England has issued important reports on atomic energy, and on new housing areas; the Church of Scotland, among others, has produced a Christian critique of

In the discussion of the larger problems of modern political and economic life, individual Christians have made a substantial contribution to the discussion which has had great influence both inside and outside the Church.[3]

Some of the new and promising steps taken in Britain to meet the circumstances outlined above are:

(a) The establishment of groups of laymen who occupy positions in which they can exercise some influence on their own professions or occupations or localities. In the Christian Frontier Council, for example, set up with the agreement and blessing of the churches but responsible to none of them, this method has also produced books and papers for the guidance of a wider public.

(b) Work with laymen by virtue of their function in society. One example of this is the work of the YMCA in England and Wales with industrial and commercial technicians.

(c) Efforts by certain groups to find ways of integrating the theological, liturgical and sociological activities of the Church, making social concerns an integral part of the normal life of the local church. Also there is a revived interest in biblical theology in the search for a more adequate theological basis for social ethics than was provided by the "social gospel" as it was known in Britain.

(d) The assumption of chaplaincy duties in industry and

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communism; the Congregational Union has published a report on European Unity; the Methodist Church has given serious thought to problems arising in the Welfare State and in industry, as have other bodies; the British Council of Churches has issued important statements on "Christian Responsibility in Industry," "Christians at Work," "Strikes and Lock-Outs," and "Married Women in Industry." These are only a few examples, but they indicate an alertness in the churches and among Christian groups and movements which needs to become more widespread as well as more profound.

[3] The writings of two British historians may be cited to illustrate the searching rethinking of the meaning of Christian faith for society: H. Butterfield, *Christianity and History,* and G. Kitson Clark, *The English Inheritance.*

commerce by the clergy, bringing them into a closer connection with people in their work.

(e) The Iona Community. This is an association of ministers and laity in the Church of Scotland, who live according to a simple common rule, and spend part of the summer together on the island of Iona working at manual tasks and taking part in discussions and conferences; it has a deep concern for social matters and in particular for the working class.

(f) The establishment of colleges and training centers by both the Anglican and free churches seeking to give theological training to those laymen who are engaged in various aspects of social work in an attempt to create a theologically literate laity, and in addition developing shorter courses and schools for personnel managers and welfare workers in industry.

B. Attitudes on Specific Social Issues

It is difficult to summarize the tendency of Christian thinking in Britain on specific social issues. As already noted above, the churches and Christian groups are engaged primarily in exploring the situation resulting from the type of social welfare society which has developed in Britain after the war. There seems to be general agreement that modern technical society inevitably involves a large degree of planning. For example, the report on *Personal Freedom in a Planned Society* issued in 1950 by the Committee on the Church and the Community of the Presbyterian Church of England declares that:

> The interdependence of modern technical civilisation makes planning not only desirable, but possible; and the satisfaction of social justice makes it necessary. These broad principles all parties and shades of political opinion accept; they part company only on the point where the line shall be drawn.

The report also points out that:

> Freedom and planning are not necessarily opposites, for planning may be itself the way to freedom. Quite plainly the Welfare State

delivers many people from the pressures and anxieties of poverty to develop their free personalities; and full employment, which is the foundation of freedom for working men, cannot be secured without planning. A wisely planned state is the true alternative to totalitarian control. Any return today to *laissez-faire* would swiftly produce such chaos that men would gladly surrender power to the dictator who promised to put things straight. Christians, therefore, will welcome that measure of planning which is consistent with fundamental freedom, and will gladly recognise in many of its achievements a Christian valuation of men, and an approximation to the just social order for which the Old Testament prophets pleaded in the name of God.

Judging from the trend of discussion, the main social problems confronting people in Britain are to develop further the meaning of community life at the local level and between social classes, to preserve the responsibility of the individual and avoid the overconcentration of power in national governmental agencies, to increase the efficiency and productivity of industry and to avoid the "evident tendency of the Welfare State to make us all preoccupied with security and cosiness."[4]

Also more than in the past there is a recognition that the welfare of the British peoples cannot be separated from the welfare of other peoples. Stimulated partly by pamphlets published by the parliamentary group of Christian socialists there has been a growing consideration in the churches of the social conditions of the underdeveloped countries.

[4] A. R. Vidler, "The Welfare State from a Christian Point of View," in *Theology*, Dec., 1952, p. 448.

IV

SOCIAL THOUGHT AND ACTION IN THE UNITED STATES

In the United States the rapid changes in economic and political life have led to the need for rethinking the relation between Christian faith and social action and also the Church's responsibility in society.

In the years before the war Christian social thinking was motivated largely by the ideas contained in the statement known as "The Social Ideals of the Churches" (first published in 1908, and revised in 1912 and 1932). This statement, although its principles are compatible with a variety of theological positions, may be regarded as an epitome of the thinking of the American churches which developed during the ascendancy of the so-called "social gospel" movement,[1] and of both the contributions and inadequacies of that movement. On the one hand, it was the social gospel which delivered the American churches from a very individualistic interpretation of society and of Christian responsibility. It also brought the churches together on a pragmatic approach to certain social problems which enabled them to move beyond traditional theological quarrels into areas of common responsibility. In both these respects all American Christian social thought and action today is the heir of the social gospel.

On the other hand, however, the inadequacies of the social gospel have become apparent in recent years. The social gospel

[1] The "social gospel" was not really one movement, but a whole constellation of movements. Any interpretation of the social gospel as a whole is, therefore, necessarily very general, and would not always apply accurately to every phase of the movement.

has been challenged in a number of ways. In the first place, it has been undermined by history, by political and economic developments which have brought most of its hopes (as represented, for example, in "The Social Ideals of the Churches") into reality, thus taking much of the "bite" out of its social witness. The rethinking of the social gospel has coincided with the transition in America from *laissez-faire* capitalism to what is sometimes called "welfare capitalism" which has closer similarities to the economic developments in Britain than is usually realized on either side of the Atlantic.

The social gospel has also been undermined ideologically, by theological movements which have challenged its Pelagianism, its easy optimism, and its tendency to make too direct an identification of certain social goals with the whole of the Christian Gospel. These movements, which reflect similar theological trends all over the world, have been largely spurred on in the U. S. A. by such thinkers as Reinhold Niebuhr and by the ecumenical conferences on social problems at Oxford, 1937, and Amsterdam, Section III, 1948.[2]

The process of rethinking Christian social responsibility has been complicated by other changes in the political and economic scene as a whole, in which the churches and church people have themselves been involved. Most notable is the tremendous shift over the past twenty years in the attitude toward the social welfare activities of government. No major political group would now dare to advocate the repeal of the major New Deal social legislation. In actual practice, most of the major goals of the "welfare state" are now wholeheartedly accepted, even by those groups which constantly attack the concept of the welfare state.

Against the background of this general shift toward the left in action, if not in thought, in the country as a whole, there

[2] See John C. Bennett, *Christian Ethics and Social Policy* (1946), John A. Hutchinson, ed., *Christian Faith and Social Action* (1953), Paul Ramsey, *Basic Christian Ethics,* (1951), Walter Muelder, *Religion and Economic Responsibility* (1953), and Reinhold Niebuhr, *Christian Realism and Political Problems* (1953).

is a new awareness of the dangers involved in the increase of the power of the Federal government. Accepting in the main the achievements of the past twenty years of increased government activity in economic and social affairs, American public opinion is now concerned that the centralized power of government should not be expanded indefinitely. At the same time, the new social power wielded by organized labor makes it necessary for the churches to avoid the uncritical support of labor that was characteristic of many social gospel crusaders, and yet to realize that labor needs to be sympathetically interpreted to the middle-class constituency of the churches.

Another result of this shift has been the appearance of relatively small but extremely vocal groups supporting the kind of highly conservative point of view which no longer finds any expression in the programs of either major political party. These groups have become increasingly noticeable within the churches themselves. The situation has been described as follows:

> The social gospel emphasis on the application of Christian ethics to social life tended, particularly in the 1930's, to become rather uncritical of collectivist answers to our questions. Now there has developed in our Protestant churches a very extreme type of individualism which wants to go back to an absolutely unreconstructed capitalism.[3]

Faced with "the one-sided tendency toward collectivism" and "a one-sided tendency toward individualism," the churches have found it necessary to build a better foundation for thinking about the Christian witness in relation to economic and political issues.

To explore the relevance of Christian thought for the increasingly complex issues in American economic life the National Council of Churches has a Department of Church

[3] Statement of Prof. John C. Bennett, University of Chicago Round Table (NBC Radio Discussion) on the Goals of Economic Life, March 1, 1953. For a discussion of Protestant right-wing and left-wing groups, see Ralph Roy, *Apostles of Discord* (1953).

and Economic Life which includes representatives of major elements in the economy as well as professional economists and theologians. The organization of this department stemmed from the Federal Council's conference on the Church and Economic Life, held in Pittsburgh in 1947. The continuous co-operative study promoted by this department on such issues as industrial relations, inflation, agriculture, etc. has been of great significance in finding the way toward a Christian approach to economic questions. Its nation-wide conferences (the National Study Conference on the Church and Economic Life, Detroit, 1950, and the Conference on the Christian in his Daily Work, Buffalo, 1952) have received wide attention and have exerted powerful influence in the thinking of the churches on these questions. The most ambitious project of the Department to date is the study and research program begun in 1949, which has resulted in the publication of the six-volume series on "Christian Ethics and Economic Life."[4] These volumes do not represent official declarations of the National Council of Churches but are for study and discussion and will be used in a nation-wide program of consultation in the churches.

The work of the denominations through their various departments in the area of social education and action has continued, and in the case of several denominations has greatly expanded. The Methodist Church in 1952 established a Board of Social and Economic Relations. The Protestant Episcopal Church's Department of Christian Social Relations has been expanding and at the same time re-evaluating its work. It has recently completed a thorough survey of "what the Church has done and is actually doing" in the field of social education and action.

[4] The titles of the volumes are: *Goals of Economic Life, The Organisational Revolution, Social Responsibilities of the Businessman, American Income and Its Use, The American Economy and the Lives of People,* and *Ethics and Economic Life* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1953).

The recent developments concerning the Council for Social Action of the Congregational Christian Churches illustrate the points at which such work is being challenged today. In view of various criticisms of the work of the social action body, the Congregational General Council appointed a Board of Review to make an appraisal of its work. The Board's report includes criticisms of the Council for Social Action for being too one-sided in its point of view, but recommends the continuation of the Council and of its program of social action, in a way which will take more account of opposing opinions.

A few independent and ecumenical social action groups still remain. Among groups having particular social concerns may be mentioned the Religion and Labor Foundation, the Fellowship of Reconciliation, and the Fellowship of Southern Churchmen. Perhaps the most important is Christian Action, which was formed in 1951 from a coalition of several smaller movements and a number of individuals.

It ought also to be mentioned that the various youth and women's organizations of the churches, while not organized specifically for the purpose of social study and action, are often among the most active and effective groups working in the area.

A new trend in the social thinking of the American churches is the increased interest in political questions. Several informal groups have been giving attention to political problems over the past years, and increasing recognition is being given to them in the official programs of the denominations and of the National Council of Churches. The annual Churchmen's Washington Seminars, sponsored by the National Council, have been widely attended by representatives of all denominations, and the National Council is now in the process of forming a permanent Department of Christian Citizenship, which will in the future provide for study of political problems comparable to that which the Department of Church and Economic Life has given to economic questions.

In this connection, particular mention ought to be made of

the increasing concern of the churches in the whole area of democratic freedom. This problem has become particularly crucial in relation to investigations of communism and communist influence in public life. Individual church leaders have made strong and influential statements on this subject, as have some of the denominations and the National Council of Churches. The National Council has recently established a Committee on the Maintenance of American Freedom whose specific task it is to interpret developments in this area.

It is in these varied ways that the churches in the United States are seeking to deal with the new problems in Christian thinking about social questions which have been created by recent economic and political developments.

The Social Teaching of the Churches

It is extremely difficult to interpret and summarize the trend of American church opinion on social issues, particularly because of the disparity which is known to exist but is difficult to measure, between the statements of church bodies and the actual positions or working hypotheses taken by the church constituency itself. Some things, however, can be said, at least about American church opinion in its ecumenical expression.

On economic questions, Christian opinion emphasizes that there can be no sanction for one-sided support of either economic individualism or economic collectivism.[5] It has been noted that the outstanding difference between the conception of social responsibility held by business men and that implicit in Protestant pronouncements on economic affairs is in the attitude toward the capitalist system itself.

> The business man, accepting it as inherently desirable, may see the need only of a more persuasive 'selling job', whereas Protestant thinkers are likely to be much more skeptical of capitalism undiluted. The idea of the 'mixed economy' with large measures of

[5] Cf. "The Church and Economic Life: Basic Christian Principles and Assumptions," a statement adopted by the Executive Committee of the Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America, Sept., 1948, p. 5.

social control and social ownership, seems much more acceptable to Protestant thinkers than to businessmen.[6]

The greatly expanded role of organized economic groups such as farmers, workers and industrialists has led the American churches to stress the responsibility which is laid upon such groups. "The problem of making organized groups responsible overshadows all other economic considerations."[7]

The churches have been particularly alert to the responsibility of the United States for the economic well-being of the whole world, and especially of the economically and technologically underdeveloped countries. The Detroit Conference summarized this responsibility in ten points, covering domestic economic policies in relation to their international consequences.[8]

In the study of the implications of the responsible society for political life there is an effort to avoid doctrinaire positions of either the "right" or "left." Such questions as the meaning of freedom, the function and limits of the state, the role of the Christian citizen, the stand against totalitarianism and the role of the Church in political life are being approached in this way.

Finally, it must be noted that, in relation to the subject of communism, the churches in America have repeatedly affirmed their opposition to totalitarian communism, but at the same time they have been concerned about the dangers to freedom inherent in irresponsible anticommunism. Many pronounce-

[6] H. R. Bowen, *Social Responsibilities of the Businessman* (1953), p. 41.

[7] "The Responsibility of the Christian in an Interdependent Economic World." Statement and Reports of the National Study Conference on the Church and Economic Life, Detroit, Feb. 1950, p. 16.

[8] *Ibid.*, pp. 22-25. See also "The Message to the Churches on Christian Faith and International Responsibility," from the fourth national Conference on the Churches and World Order, held under the auspices of the National Council of Churches in Cleveland, Oct., 1953. This report strongly emphasizes the need for economic policies favorable to world trade and for various forms of economic aid to the underdeveloped countries.

ments of church bodies including the National Council of Churches have expressed this concern. The most vigorous statement by any such body was written by President John A. Mackay of Princeton Theological Seminary, the Moderator of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and adopted by the General Council of that Church. After calling attention to the ways in which Congressional investigations have threatened the freedom of American citizens, this Presbyterian statement says:

> A great many people, within and without our Government, approach the problem of Communism in a purely negative way. Communism, which is at bottom a secular religious faith of great vitality, is thus being dealt with as an exclusively police problem.
>
> As a result of this there is growing up over against Communism a fanatical negativism. Totally devoid of any constructive program of action, this negativism is in danger of leading the American mind into a spiritual vacuum. Our national house, cleansed of one demon, would invite by its very emptiness the entrance of seven others. In the case of a national crisis this emptiness could, in the high-sounding name of security, be occupied with ease by a fascist tyranny.

V

THE NEW CONCERN FOR SOCIAL PROBLEMS IN THE EUROPEAN CHURCHES

There has arisen in Europe in the postwar years a new awareness of the task of the Church in society and a remarkable development of groups and organizations to implement this concern. During the war the churches of Europe discovered at a deeper level their function in relation to society. They discovered the extensive paganization of European culture, the meaning of Christian freedom from the total claims of all political and economic systems and, at the same time, the points in the social system with which Christians must be concerned as part of the spiritual battle. It has been shown in many studies how as a result of this period of discovery for the churches, "some of the narcotic effects of their silent alliance with the world were at last shaken off. The realities of the situation became clear. The churches found out that they had to fight or die. . . ."[1]

In the postwar period this process of renewal has continued. The "partly static and partly dynamic" spiritual situation of Europe has led to a conflict in the Church "between the forces of conservatism which sought to return to the ways of the good old days, and the forces of renewal which realized that the churches were called to newness of life, to reformation of all that had become deformed in the course of their history . . ."[2] There has been a new realization that to survive at

[1] W. A. Visser 't Hooft, "Europe: Renewal or Survival," an essay published in *World Faith in Action,* ed. C. T. Leber, 1951, p. 78.
[2] *Ibid.,* p. 79.

all Europe must be renewed in its spirit, in its purpose for living, in its conception of right social relations in its own body, and right relations between the community of Europe and the rest of the world. This has led to a fundamental re-examination of the Christian tradition in European society and an effort to take seriously the political struggles of the present.

Today these lessons of the war and postwar years are being verified by the new struggle of the churches in Eastern Europe, and more particularly in Eastern Germany, where the battle by the Church with totalitarian communism has been largely a spiritual battle.

A. Theological Renewal and Social Concern

The new concern of the Church for the world evident in Europe is thus not only a reaction to a political situation of change, but is based also on a renewal of theology, especially on the theological discoveries which churches in Europe have made during the last two or three decades. The renewal of European theology began in the twenties and thirties but it was in the experiences of war years that its full effects were felt. The European theologians most prominently associated with this theological renewal are Karl Barth and Emil Brunner, although many other theologians have made important contributions. Mention should be made in particular of certain developments in Lutheran interpretations of the Two Kingdoms (in Sweden and in Germany), which have resulted in a new concern for social problems.

The characteristics of this theological renewal are rediscovery of the Bible as a living message, the preaching of that message to a world in spiritual distress, and the recovery of the prophetic quality of Christian faith which enables people to see clearly the alternatives between faith in the God revealed in Christ and the claims of contemporary ideologies. On the basis of these ideas the reconstruction of Christian

social theology in Europe is being achieved. It has not been carried through without confusion and disagreement. (Witness, for example, the argument whether Professor Barth has or has not tended to put an absolute Christian sanction on a particular political position.) Nevertheless, this theological renewal is showing how biblical insights can illumine the spiritual issues involved in contemporary political problems. This has been especially true for the Christian confrontation of communism.[3]

Laymen have contributed significantly to a new approach to social issues by challenging the theologian to explain the relation of biblical faith to their own experience in society.

There is much to be done before this theological renewal penetrates into the life of the Church and the thinking of Christians in many European countries. It is stated, for example, in the report from Sweden that "theological thinking has given very little help in approaching the ethical problems involved in concrete economic and political problems. . . . the decisions on social questions of today have been left to laymen." Moreover, while there is much theological writing on such subjects as Church and State, etc., the problems of democracy and of political ethics have not been thoroughly treated from the Christian standpoint. "The fundamental problem with all treatment of Christian social ethics seems to be to build the bridge that connects ideas formed on principles with a realistic programme of action."

These and other questions have yet to be squarely faced. Nevertheless, in the process of working on different problems and in experimenting with different methods the European churches are laying the foundations for a stronger social witness in the future.

[3] See, for example, the book by Prof. H. Gollwitzer, . . . *Und Führen Wohin du Nicht Willst* (Munich, 1952). Title of English edition, *Unwilling Journey,* SCM Press (London, 1953).

B. The Social Problems of Europe

The social problems which confront the European churches today are massive and complex, and three aspects need to be considered:

(1) *Social Justice in National Life.* Most Western European countries have recovered from the devastation of the war and have equaled if not exceeded their prewar economic prosperity. In the process of rebuilding some of them have discovered ways of overcoming old tensions between social classes, especially between workers and employers. But in others there are grave social problems and issues. Particularly in France and Italy there are serious conflicts regarding the right social policy to deal with unemployment and housing, higher standards of living for workers, social security, inflation, and rights of workers in industry. Most of these countries have developed elaborate schemes for social security but not all are successful in making them work. The Korean war and the rearmament of Europe which followed brought new economic difficulties. In many countries poverty is still very widespread and class tensions and conflicts drain the vitality of the community while antidemocratic groups are able to take advantage of the weakness of governments. Everywhere great changes affecting economic, industrial, and political life are likely in the future. The churches have much to do if they are to help to determine the goals of social policy and show the meaning of responsible living in this situation.

(2) *The Search for the New Europe.* It is clear that the renewal of Europe depends not only on a correct and energetic policy within the countries themselves but on the possibility of achieving some kind of political and economic union between them. Individually they are too weak to effect their own economic and political renewal or to guarantee military security. Their economic welfare depends on obtaining the advantages of production for a larger market and greater specialization in industrial life. The development of supranational insti-

tutions is, however, still at an early stage and it is already clear that it involves a revolutionary transformation in the economic and political thinking of people in Europe. This development is a challenge especially to those European churches which have generally been dominated in the past by an exclusively national pattern of organization and interest. It requires a fundamental re-examination of the Christian tradition in relation to the whole of European society.

(3) *Europe between East and West.* The problems cited above must be considered in relation to the role of Europe in the present world struggle. The separation of Eastern and Western Europe, the constantly recurring fear of a "showdown" between the Western powers and the Soviet Union, the fear of war, and the hope for a *modus vivendi*—all these are factors which constantly influence the method and the psychology of approaching many social problems in Europe. Can Western Europe achieve the necessary unity without increasing the gulf between itself and Eastern Europe and without becoming the pawn of American power? Many people in Western Europe are anxious to show that a united Europe is not necessarily an ally of the U. S. and an enemy of Russia, but an independent force which Russia need not fear and which invites neighborly relations with Eastern Europe. Also there are a considerable number of people, particularly in France, who are convinced that the present world struggle is an ideological conflict between Russian communism and American capitalism, and that Europe should be absolutely neutral between them. This issue has inevitably raised an intense debate about attitudes toward Russian communism, about the role of Europe between East and West in which the churches in almost every country have been heavily involved.

In relation to these problems, many European churches have urged their members to take their political and social duties seriously, not with the hope of creating some ideal

"Christian society," but as a fundamental part of living their Christian faith in the world.

To implement this concern, and to guide Christian thinking in view of all the complexities of contemporary social problems, there has developed in many churches on the continent an exceedingly comprehensive and substantial organization of study and action groups and Christian social institutes, dealing with the vast range of social issues and problems which confront European countries today. Laymen and youth are being mobilized to participate in this work because it is strongly felt that in dealing with social problems the practical experience and the technical *expertise* of laymen must be added to the contribution of the theologian.

C. The Churches and Social Justice

Up to World War II, the churches had been concerned primarily with Christian social service and charity, leaving to independent and unofficial social action groups the concern for the fundamental structure of the economic and social order. Since the war the European churches have given practical and constructive help on a large scale to refugees and displaced persons, and they have greatly enlarged and strengthened their social diaconate. But in addition to these practical efforts for social welfare, the churches are seeking to define their approach to the larger problems of developing responsible economic and political systems.

Speaking generally, Christian opinion in Europe tends to support a measure of state intervention in economic life as a social necessity. On this point, for example, the report from Sweden states:

> . . . there are diverging opinions among the different parties, and thus also among Christians. There is no disagreement about the fact that interventions by the state are necessary to a certain extent. Besides, a change can be observed in the present political debate on interventions by the state. The main question is not

nationalisation or not, socialisation or not, but to what extent the state ought to control and to regulate.

A recent report on *The Changes in Society and State and the Church's Call for a Responsible Society,* prepared under the auspices of the Social Commission of the Dutch Ecumenical Council, declares that the "welfare state" is based on the idea of greater responsibility in social and human relations:

> Thanks to the dynamics of social development and the impossibility of allowing *laissez-faire* to continue, the state has found itself obliged to accept a share of responsibility for the process of production, for labour affairs and for the protection of individual man. . . . If we look back on the history of the last half-century in the West, the institution which we now call the welfare state is seen to be dominated above all by (a) the protection of the weak by authority; (b) the campaign to achieve a juster economic order; (c) an effort to do away with the causes of defects in the economic structure.

The Dutch statement concludes that the Church in its concern for strengthening and deepening the meaning of responsibility in society

> must no longer resist but must, in its own fashion, co-operate with those forces in society which regard the *laissez-faire* principle as untenable, and which seek to replace it by that of a system serving spiritual freedom—though it is important to keep a sharp look-out lest this concept conceal a collective egoism.

In Germany, also, where the official economic policy is aimed at establishing a new type of free enterprise system, it is generally agreed that the issue is not "capitalism versus socialism," but how to find the right combination of freedom and control in economic life:

> It is taken for granted that this combination is not achieved by a policy of *laissez-faire.* The criticism of the socialist opposition . . . raises one main objection, that inadequate planning has resulted in a lack of balance between production and distribution. On the other hand, the advocates of a more liberal economic policy stress the

dangers of a centralised administration, which nobody wants. But in practice the difference does not consist in rejecting state intervention of every kind. No state can govern today without a whole series of controls, but opinions differ (a) concerning the extent of such state intervention, and (b) concerning the form it should take.

There is a considerable body of Christian opinion which, remembering the Nazi regimentation of economic and social life, regards the growth of state power with apprehension, as opening the way to new totalitarianism and a new threat to personal dignity and freedom. Bishop Berggrav of Norway, in an address on "State and Church Today" before the Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation (Hannover, July, 1952), has strongly criticized the totalitarian tendencies in the modern state, but in speaking about the "welfare state" in this connection he says:

> The welfare state as such does *not* belong to this category, and it need not develop in this direction provided the Church and individual Christians exercise their influence. We should recognise the God-given tasks of the state and assist it in all its worthy endeavours.

Bishop Berggrav emphasizes four "legitimate demands which the Church may direct to the welfare state":

> (1) The Church must demand the undiminished freedom to proclaim the Word of God and to exercise Christian love in the service of men. The Church dare not be satisfied with the assurance that freedom of worship is guaranteed. An attempt by the state to sterilise the social welfare work of the Church would constitute a frontal attack upon the freedom of the Gospel.
>
> (2) The Church must not allow itself to be exploited by the state for political purposes. The Church must not become a tool of power politics.
>
> (3) The right to determine the education of the children belongs to the parents. The free time of children and youth must not be monopolized by state agencies.
>
> (4) The state must force nothing upon anyone, whether child or adult, that is contrary to God's clear commandments. A state which

arrogates to itself the right to determine what is good and what is evil must logically think of itself as an institute of salvation, and this is equivalent to the deification of the state. Christians must be allowed to have their own religious convictions; this right is one of the basic rights of man, even in states where practising Christians form a minority of the population.[4]

D. Efforts to Overcome Tensions between Church and Workers

Another illustration of the new social concern of the European churches is the new attitude toward workers. It is stated in the report from Germany that "the greatest handicap of Protestant Christianity in Germany has always been in its bourgeois (often petit-bourgeois) character, and its hostility to the socialist workers." A report from Sweden also emphasizes the carry-over of misunderstanding from the old conflict between the Church and the workers' movement. In the years since the war the churches in many parts of Europe have made a great effort to span the "almost unbridgeable gulf which had arisen in the second half of the 19th century between the churches, defending the ethos and morals of pre-industrial society, and the workers living in the technical and impersonal world of great industry."[5] The churches have realized their responsibility for the alienation of workers from the Church, and the workers are modifying the materialistic philosophy of their socialist tendencies, which makes it possible to begin breaking down old prejudices on both sides. Through conferences and discussions with socialists, the churches (including independent Christian groups) in Holland, Germany and Scandinavia have been able with some success to overcome the former hostility. For example, in the spring of 1953 a conference on the relation between socialism and religion, organized by the secretariat of the Socialist International, was held at a Christian institute in Holland. The conference provided

[4] Similar requirements are made of the state by Bishop Dibelius in his book *Die Grenzen des Staates* (Furche-Verlag, 1949).

[5] W. A. Visser 't Hooft, *op. cit.*, p. 87.

an opportunity for Christians to question the anticlerical and antireligious attitudes of socialists, and for socialists to inquire about the socially conservative views of the Christians. Referring to similar efforts in Germany, a report tells us:

> The Church's relation to socialism has changed considerably. There are a number of reasons for this. The effects of the movement for religious socialism, which grew up after the first world war, are still felt. More important is the common resistance of the Protestant Church and of liberal socialism to National Socialism. The Protestant Church has no social programme of its own; it endeavours rather to listen and to learn. It tries to loosen fronts which have become rigid, and to overcome the dogmatism which is so typical of political discussion in Germany, even today. Moreover, during the last decades the Socialist Party in Germany has changed considerably.

Through its new approach, and by its endeavor to create a friendlier atmosphere with socialists, the Church, while not ignoring certain fundamental problems of socialist ideology, is endeavoring to show that it is not "preoccupied with one class to the detriment of the others." In the relatively few instances where the leaders of the Church have spoken on specific social issues, they have supported the passage of legislation which was of vital concern to workers.

E. Human Relations in Industry

There has also been much discussion in European churches of the threat to human values in "modern mass society," with particular attention to the spiritual and moral problems of work in the technical mass environment of modern industry. This has led to a consideration of the ways by which industrial work could be made a vocation in the Christian sense and the changes needed in the structure of industrial life to realize this. In Holland, Germany, France and throughout Scandinavia, new patterns of relations between workers and employers are being developed and Christian study groups and churches have begun to define Christian attitudes in relation to these

developments. There is space here only to mention some of the points which have received the most attention:

(1) the social responsibility of industrial management and owners, and the need for a wider distribution of property rights in industry;

(2) the need for greater participation by workers in determining the structure of industrial relations and the issues involved in the various proposals for achieving this (*Mitbestimmung* in Germany, *comités d'entreprise* in France, etc.);

(3) the role of the trade union, i. e., the problem of increasing trade union responsibility, the role of Christians in a trade union dominated by a secular ideology or a political party, etc.;

(4) the development of industrial planning and organization so as to avoid the mass character of life in industrial community (efforts to avoid large urban industrial concentrations, etc.).

F. The Churches and European Unity

It is becoming clear as a result of the developments in European life that the churches must not only make their witness in relation to the developments of each nation, but bear witness together concerning the social and economic trends affecting the whole of European society.

In 1950 an unofficial group of laymen formed a committee to explore the responsibility of Christians for European questions. This group, now called the Committee on the Christian Responsibility for European Co-operation, is composed of politicians and economists from most of the countries of Western Europe, and meets twice yearly to discuss European issues. It has prepared a number of reports on the possibilities for constructive action by Christians on these issues,[6] and it has sought to ask questions of the different countries, to help each

[6] See Reports of the Committee on the Christian Responsibility for European Co-operation (formerly known as the Ecumenical Commission on European Co-operation).

to see its responsibility more clearly and to clarify many points where there is disagreement and misunderstanding.

The Committee has stated its views of the Christian responsibility as follows:

> This [European] situation represents a challenge to the European churches. For, as has become clear . . . the question of European unity is not merely a tactical political problem, but at the same time a moral and spiritual issue of decisive importance. If it is true —and we believe it to be true—that no responsible society can be built in European nations unless the area of cooperation is greatly enlarged, then the churches must take this question very seriously.
>
> They can exert a creative influence, and help governments and peoples to face facts, to accept sacrifices and to seek the common weal, instead of selfish and local interests. They can help to build that indispensable foundation of common conviction concerning the place of man in society without which European unity can have no permanent and stable basis. So far the European churches have done very little to discharge this responsibility. There is today a great deal of cooperation and contact between European Christians, but these new ecumenical relationships have not yet borne fruit in constructive common thinking about the problem of European common life.[7]

In the opinion of the Committee, "it is essential that the sphere of the supranational European institutions be extended as quickly and effectively as possible."

The Committee is agreed that European unity must not be conceived in such a way as to solidify the isolation of Western from Eastern Europe. "The Europe . . . we want to construct is not a Western Europe but a free Europe. There must be room for all those who at present either cannot or do not wish to participate." The Committee also has stated that the renewal of Europe must include a new relationship with the nations of Asia and Africa. The European nations must understand that

[7] From the Report of the Committee, published Jan. 1951.

the time is past when they could have unilateral relations with the nations of Asia and Africa. . . . Europe still has a great responsibility to fulfil in Asia and Africa, namely to help the countries of these continents in their economic development and to aid them, on the basis of European experience, in solving their social problems.[8]

In these ways the Committee has tried to point out to Christians in Europe that an entire new world of Christian service and action is opened to the churches in the present European situation.

[8] From the statement on Germany and European Cooperation, Jan. 1952.

VI

THE CHURCHES AND THE POLITICAL AND SOCIAL UPHEAVAL OF THE UNDERDEVELOPED COUNTRIES

The social changes taking place in Asia, Africa and Latin America confront the churches in these countries and throughout the world with the need for social thinking and action in an entirely new framework. The lives of people in these areas are being completely changed by movements for political independence and self-determination in economic matters, by industrialization and the organization of economic and social life on functional rather than on traditional lines, by the spread of new convictions about the nature of the universe and the meaning of human life and by the revolt against enslaving and exploiting institutions. There is a need for rapid change, and social developments which have taken centuries in the West have to be accomplished in decades in these areas and all at the same time. Competent observers agree in their description of the chaos which threatens in consequence of the lack of an agreed basis for swift social improvement.

Scores of millions in South and South East Asia drift helplessly in an ocean with dangerous currents. The area is wide open to all ideologies and philosophies; people are eager for a change, without knowing where to go or how to start. Modern nationalism, unknown to a village society or an absolute monarchy, has a grip on the masses, easily fed by resentment against foreign imperialism and economic penetration. It gives national governments the possibility of achieving real progress through an appeal to patriotism. But it also closes many doors to foreigners. Yet the nations are more than

ever interdependent, and international cooperation is unavoidable, to say the least.[1]

A report on social conditions in the Middle East concludes:

> At the present time, the Middle East is in the grip of a social upheaval the causes and ingredients of which are varied and complex. . . . The byword in many quarters is change, though there is little unanimity on what change is desirable, or how it is to be effected, or at what pace.[2]

And from Latin America a correspondent writes:

> We are living in a total revolutionary situation into which many other factors enter, principal among them being the almost total political breakdown in these countries with the collapse of liberal democratic movements and the almost complete lack of an alternative to Communism, which leads the most sensitive people . . . to despair or Communism. . . . We are sitting on the top of a volcano which might erupt at any moment.

A rise in the standard of living, expansion of the necessary social services, and the improvement of educational and health facilities are needed, and these depend upon the ability of the countries concerned to devise social and economic policies and programs for overcoming the various causes of their economic weakness. This means in most cases better and more efficient use of the land, reorganization of village life, improvement in the means of transportation and communication, industrialization, efficient government administration, etc. It also requires social understanding of the highest order, a sense of direction regarding the goals of social change and a will to share the responsibility and the sacrifices involved in achieving

[1] E. de Vries, "The Churches and the Economic and Social Problems of South and South East Asia," in *Christ—The Hope Of Asia,* Papers and Minutes of the Ecumenical Study Conference for East Asia, Lucknow, India, Dec. 27-30, 1952 (Madras: The Christian Literature Society, 1953), p. 57.

[2] *Preliminary Report on the World Social Situation,* United Nations Economic and Social Council, April, 1952, p. 372.

a better society. It is these intellectual and spiritual resources which need to be discovered and developed:

> Governments can only support and never replace the efforts of the nation as a community of responsible citizens. But can these governments expect their citizens to act that way? Hardly—it is one of the tragedies of Asia that opportunities are only by a hairsbreadth separated from defeat and disaster. The same forces which made Asia free from foreign domination are apt to destroy it from within, unless channelled and directed in the right way. It is here that the real responsibilities of the churches in Asia begin: building communities of responsible citizens of free nations.[3]

The demands being made upon the human spirit are overwhelming. In some countries within a generation or two people are making the transition from primitive seminomadic, pastoral and hunting communities to the complex life of modern industrial society. The economic change cannot be stopped. An African missionary writes:

> It is useless to gird at this process of industrialization. Africa needs the wealth which, it seems, only the addition of industrial development can supply. For good or ill, the African is caught up in the modern world of industry and commerce.[4]

To deal with this revolution in economic life, the rapid growth of big cities in Asia and the dissolution of village communities, some common views and standards are needed for guiding the introduction of new techniques and new institutions which will guard against their being used to destroy rather than to enlarge the possibilities of man for self-realization.

The experiences with industrial development in underdeveloped countries indicate that when industrialism is pursued irrespective of the person, the challenge to the human person may be as great if not greater than in the preindustrial society. The same African missionary writes that there are

[3] E. de Vries, "The Churches and the Economic and Social Problems of South and South-East Asia," *op. cit.*

[4] R. K. Orchard, *Africa Steps Out,* London, 1952, p. 18.

two contrasting social organisations in Africa today,—the collectivism of the traditional tribal society, and the individualism of the industrial and commercial societies which the West has brought into Africa. In neither of them can the African find a full personal life.[5]

The fight to maintain personal integrity comes to a decisive engagement in, particularly, the field of African family life:

> The change from a barter to a money system, from a subsistence to a cash economy, from a strongly communal to a markedly individualistic society . . . all these and many other social and economic changes now sweeping through Africa have their most far-reaching and devastating effect on family life. The greatest single threat to the future of Africa is the absence of a recognised and accepted framework within which the life of families can grow strong and vigorous.[6]

How do the churches express their concern for these and many other issues and questions confronting people in countries undergoing such rapid change? The churches have a vital interest in the foundations of the new societies and in the problems which their social environment presents to their members, especially to youth.

A. The New Stage of Christian Social Thought in the Churches of Asia, Africa and Latin America

Reports from Asia, Africa and Latin America indicate that the churches and missions are being awakened to a new understanding of Christian social responsibility by the impact of social upheaval and unrest in many of these countries. The rise of political movements for national freedom and the attainment of national independence in many countries have made it necessary for Christians to define the Christian conception of the goals of society which are relevant to the situation of these countries.

[5] *Ibid.*, p. 35.
[6] *Ibid.*, pp. 38-39.

It would be presumptuous to characterize this new development of Christian concern for society as more than in its preliminary stages. "The churches as a whole," says a report, "have not yet realized that Christian social thinking is needed, nor have they recognized that it is their duty to encourage and inspire such thinking . . ." They are too preoccupied by the struggle "for self-existence in the narrow sense." Nevertheless, even in the most pessimistic reports it is stated that "attempts are being made by certain groups to promote thinking on social problems."

The churches and missions are beginning to realize that they must make a witness in relation to the vast changes in economic and political life, especially since these changes are in part the perhaps unconscious consequences of Christian teaching on the dignity of man. Indirectly, through their emphasis on education and social service, Christian missions have contributed to the revolutionary ferment in Asia and Africa. As Bishop Newbigin of the Church of South India has observed:

> Because education for the past hundred years in India has been dominated by ideas derived from Christianity and often by the figure of Jesus himself, no form of popular government is possible which does not in some sense accept the idea of the welfare state. . . . Because Christianity puts into men's minds a divine discontent with things as they are and a conviction that society ought to be justly and rationally ordered, the way is open for the tremendous appeal of Marxism.[7]

The leaders of movements of national freedom and social change, even when consciously anti-Christian, have been intellectually and spiritually reared by Christian missionary institutions. The consciousness of the intimate relation between the Gospel and the ideas and ideals that inspire the revolutionary urge of the peoples of Asia and Africa is beginning to

[7] "The Background of Church Life in South India," in *The Frontier*, Nov., 1952, published by the Christian Frontier Council in Great Britain.

make Christians in these lands aware of the further contribution which the indigenous churches can make to stabilize and revitalize the social goals which people seek.

As a result of the work of Dr. Merle Davis,[8] the missionary movement began some years ago to place increasing emphasis on the economic and social environment in which the missionary endeavor is set. His studies especially helped the missions to have a new conception of the mission in rural Asia. He brought worship, preaching, education, health service, rural and industrial service, etc., into an integrated whole, with the aim of developing a community which responds to the hopes and fears of the ordinary individual. This conception still remains a valid one and one may find the consequences of it in the results of the recent Eastern Asia Christian Conferences at Bangkok (1949) and Lucknow (1952), which speak of the "revolutionary significance of the local congregation," living under God as a community bringing to bear upon all personal and institutional relationships the light of Christian faith, hope and love. Today, however, these ideas are being applied in the wider context of the nation, and even of whole regions.

Events in China especially have helped Christian missions to see their social responsibility in larger perspectives. While frequently the reaction to these events has been to whip up negative anticommunist propaganda, it has had some positive results also, in awakening the missions, and through them the "younger" churches, to the need to be concerned with social matters. The following quotation is typical of many which may be culled from missionary bulletins:

> It is no longer good enough to open dispensaries, hospitals, orphanages and schools, colleges and universities, to attract pagans to the Church. While you are caring for their bodies and cultivating

[8] See his studies for the International Missionary Council especially "The Economic and Social Environment of the Younger Churches" and Vol. V of the Madras Series.

their minds, social forces are working against you. The preaching of the Gospel must be accompanied by the proclamation of social justice.[9]

B. New Approaches at the Ecumenical Level

The Eastern Asia Christian Conference held at Bangkok, 1949, under the joint auspices of the International Missionary Council and the World Council of Churches, gave a lead in showing the relation of the Gospel to social justice in Asia. In view of "the revolutionary ferment" at work in Asia, the Bangkok meeting stated that it was "the responsibility of the Church to rediscover and proclaim both to its own members and to those outside the basic truths declared in the Bible about the life of men in society and in the state." It declared that "the proclamation of the Word of God, with a profound sense of its relevance to the ideological and political conflicts of the Orient, is therefore the central task of the Church in Asia," and it called on the churches to help "those within their fold and outside, especially youth, to understand the true nature of the social crisis in which they are, and in a positive way to accept its challenge. . . ." The churches were asked to train new types of "evangelists who will identify themselves in a costly way with the day to day struggles of the labourer and peasant for justice." The Bangkok Conference pointed out that "a true social democracy" might be an effective answer to communism in certain countries and urged the churches to help provide democracy with a moral and religious backbone so that it can become truly social.

In 1950 the International Missionary Council "in view of swift sharpening of the political, social and religious crisis, involving the world in general and the World Christian Movement in particular" issued a *Summons to Immediate Action* calling the churches and missions to join in a special program

[9] Statement of Mr. Gerard Filion, a Catholic layman, editor of the newspaper *Le Devoir* (Montreal) and delegate to the Peace Conference in Peking, Oct., 1952, quoted in the *China Bulletin* (Far Eastern Joint Office, Division of Foreign Missions, NCCC/USA, No. 8, April 20, 1953).

of study and consultation to formulate a crisis strategy to deal with three questions which included "the witness of the Church in relation to Communism." Under the program a series of consultations of missionaries and church workers were held throughout the Middle East and East Asia to discuss Christian social witness in these areas. These meetings were held under the leadership of outstanding theologians and Christian social thinkers, and they aroused widespread interest.

In December, 1952, the World Council of Churches in preparation for the Evanston Assembly sponsored an Asian Study Conference at Lucknow, and one Commission of the Conference dealt with the "Responsible Society in Asia in the Light of the World Situation." The purpose of this Commission was to relate ecumenical social thinking to the specific social and political problems of Asia within the perspective of the world situation. The report of this meeting indicates the views of Christians on specific social questions such as land reform and industrialization, and emphasizes the need for political action in support of these and other goals of the responsible society. Moreover, it stated the churches' social witness in a manner intelligible to those outside. A quotation will serve to indicate the trend of the thinking of the Asian churches on these issues:

> We are concerned with social justice, that is to say with the development of social conditions in which human dignity and freedom can find their expression as befits the nature and destiny of man as a child of God. Communism has awakened and challenged our conscience to see the need for action. It is not, however, primarily the fear of communism but our concern for our brother for whom Christ died, that should impel us to fulfil our social obligations. But a positive programme for social justice will help to meet the challenge of communism. . . .[10]

The statement goes on to stress the need for land reform, for nationalization of certain basic and key industries, together

[10] "The Responsible Society in East Asia in Light of the World Situation," in *Christ, the Hope of Asia, op. cit.*, p. 27.

with the development of large- and small-scale private industries. Christians are called upon to play their role in the development and maintenance of healthy political institutions.

C. National and Local Approaches

In connection with the parliamentary elections of 1953, the General Assembly of the National Council of Churches in Indonesia sent a letter to the churches calling their attention to their political responsibility, and suggesting particular stress on the development of political understanding and action among church members. The Assembly also expressed a desire to see Article XVIII of the Declaration of Human Rights incorporated into the Indonesian Constitution, and spoke of the need for a clearer definition of the church-state relationship.

The East Asia secretariat of the IMC and WCC are following up the stimulus of Bangkok and Lucknow through regional conferences and visits, and a volume on "Christianity and the Asian Revolution" is being prepared.

A Conference on Christian Social Action in North India, held in May, 1953, discussed problems of Indian political life. Speaking of the Welfare State, the Conference said: "As Christians we are bound to support this determination to build social justice into the fabric of Indian society." Consideration was also given to the major Indian political parties and the place of Christians in them. The conclusion was, "When everything has been taken into consideration we are left with Gandhism and socialism as the two real choices for the Christian. . . . It should not be beyond the power of Indian Christianity to provide both . . . with those elements which are lacking in the ideology of each. . . ."[11]

Organizations like the Economic Life Committees of the National Christian Councils, the great agricultural institutes, schools of social work, organizers of rural and other service projects under Christian auspices as well as movements like the Christian Ashram Movement of India make a vital con-

[11] Report of the Conference, p. 11.

tribution in solving specific social issues, but their contribution in terms of social thought has not been sufficiently developed and the relation between social service and social action needs working out in the light of an adequate theology of society.

Some of the significant contributions to Christian social thought in the churches of Asia, Africa and Latin America have come from small groups like the Youth Christian Council of Action in South India, the Christian Fellowship for Social Education and Action in North India and Japan, Schools of Sociology held in Ceylon, study groups of professors and students of social science in Tokyo, and study conferences of the Student Christian Movements of Latin America.

One of the most hopeful signs in the situation is the number of books, pamphlets and articles that are now being written on the need for rethinking Christian strategy in connection with the social situation, especially in Asia and Africa. For instance, the Federation of Philippine Christian Churches prepared a *Primer on Communism* which was used as the basis of study in twenty regional conferences during the summer of 1951, as a means of orienting Christians with respect to communism which is in their midst.

In India the Christian Institute for the Study of Society, established in 1950, which has a close relation to the churches and other Christian bodies as well as with the United Theological College in Bangalore, and the Committee for Special Literature on the Indian Church and Social Concerns, related to the National Christian Council of India, have real potentialities for becoming growing points of the Christian social thought for the churches in India. They may very well become also a pattern of formulating and expressing Christian social concern in a changing society for other countries in the area of the "younger" churches.

The development of social departments and commissions of churches such as that of the United Church of Christ

(Kyodan) in Japan and the Study Commissions of the NCCs are worthy of mention because they represent a formal recognition by churches and missions of the necessity of Christian social study, thought and action. Theological schools in many of these countries are also including the study of Church and Society in their curricula.

It is to the credit of the churches and mission boards that in these and other projects they show that they have begun to take seriously the question of Christian responsibility for social and political life. However, with a few exceptions this new concern has not yet become real in the life and work of the churches. It is, of course, an important fact that the Church *is* in Asia and Africa and *is* involved in the revolutionary situation, and that it has grown in self-sufficiency and in responsibility for, and influence on, the community. But it is also true that the Church is not yet penetrating to the level at which the character and action of society are really determined. Nor have the churches as churches shown enough awareness of the urgency of prophetic social witness. No doubt there are an increasing number of groups who are concerned with such witness, and they and their thinking are winning growing recognition by the churches. But if it is true, for example, as is said of the Church in Africa, that in the present situation "it is expected to provide Christian leadership and service for a wholly new pattern of life on a continental scale,"[12] then the churches there must orient themselves in that direction both in terms of structure and of thought. Whether as a result of failure in policy at high levels or of the momentum of a past tradition, all the available reports indicate that the churches are developing their social witness at a relatively slow pace, while social changes are occurring with unprecedented rapidity.

[12] R. K. Orchard, *op. cit.*, p. 58.

VII

THE CHRISTIAN WITNESS IN COMMUNIST COUNTRIES

As a result of the expansion of communist power in Eastern Europe and in Asia in the years following the war a large body of Christians now live in countries under communist régimes. How do Christians in these countries understand and express their responsibility for society? What is the significance for ecumenical social thinking of their experience with the communist system?

A. The Challenge of Communist Ideology

It is difficult to generalize about the specific tasks of the churches in communist countries, because circumstances vary greatly. In certain countries communism has become dominant through internal political action, in others through military occupation. In certain countries it is associated with a strong indigenous communist party, and in others it has few roots in the native soil. In certain countries it has brought far-reaching social reforms, and in others it has thwarted democratic social reform movements. In some it came with the collapse of a bankrupt régime with no available alternatives, and in others it destroyed such alternatives. In some the churches have had experience in dealing with a totalitarian situation, and in others they have not.[1]

Nevertheless, all the churches in communist lands must deal with the challenge to the Christian view of man and society resulting from communist ideology. The points of conflict between Christian faith and communist social theory

[1] See "The Responsible Society in a World Perspective," a memorandum published in *The Ecumenical Review*, Oct., 1953, p. 86.

and practice are indicated in many reports and may be summarized as follows.

(1) *The claims of a total ideology, which aims at changing the consciousness of the population to correspond with a Marxist society.* This involves the remoulding of the entire school curriculum on Marx-Leninist dialectical materialist principles, and the examination of students on their points of view as well as on their knowledge; it means also control of the channels of public information by the same ideology, the schooling of the whole population in factories, farms, offices and neighborhoods. The main problem here is what this means to the school child or student from a Christian family. The whole question of truth and sincerity is involved. Must he lie in order to remain at his school or university or must he bear witness to his faith and take the consequences?

(2) *The claim of total power which the state makes and its means of exercising it.* The communist conception of justice is completely different from that held under other régimes. The interests of the party and state are paramount, and where the state and the individual clash the former is always right. It follows that the state feels justified in using whatever methods may be found effective to subdue resistance.

(3) *The changes in the economic and political structure which result in the tendency to treat individuals and families as productive units.* This proceeds partly according to the "class war" formula of the communists, whereby property is transferred to public ownership, and positions are awarded to peasants or workers by the elimination of "landlords" or "capitalists" rather than by due process of law. It proceeds also by the total planning of the economy from the top. In collectivized industry and agriculture, personal, family and vocational life is changed by compulsory schooling and thought control, by controlled wages and by compulsory activities embracing large portions of free time.

B. The Christian Hope in Communist Society

What is the witness of the Church in face of these pressures? The Church is able to bear witness only through the courage and fortitude which comes through a deep renewal of faith. The Church lives in this situation only as it understands that it has a new opportunity, given of God, to witness to the truth of the Gospel. The great joy with which many Christians in communist countries welcome the test of their faith is well illustrated by the words of a young pastor who was imprisoned for a period during the "church struggle" in Eastern Germany in 1953. He writes:

> Let me say clearly to start with, it is a good and precious thing to preach here in the East, that Jesus Christ alone, Lord and Saviour, refreshes the weary and the suffering, and that He has found the lost and the strayed; no one can snatch them from His hands or take from them the peace which their Almighty Father gives. . . . The man who has a light in the darkness of night is well established. Many wanderers will join him because they see from afar that "there is light, guidance, security." As Hitler came to power, all the stars of the bourgeois world lost their brilliance one by one, and many a citizen discovered with amazement the little light of the Gospel. Here among us in the East the old stars never came out again. A new (communist) religion, claiming the whole universe as well as the inmost conscience of men, is being proclaimed from the rooftops and in the smallest rooms. Yet the . . . years we have been hearing it have only been able to make us more sure of the truth of God, and more sustained by it. . . . It is our growing experience that God's word is like a hammer which smashes the greatest rocks. Who can but rejoice at the chance to be there!

Most Christian thinking in this situation starts by affirming a theological basis which strongly emphasizes hope because the historical action of God is so important. It takes as its starting point the Lordship of Christ over history and over the Church; this makes the Church free from all concern for earthly position or power, and critical of all ideologies. It recognizes the judgment of God in the events which led to

communist rule, the importance of concrete repentance, and of accepting Christ in this new society. This does not imply acceptance of the system. The way of Christ is to follow a Lord who took the sins of the world upon himself, who suffered and rose again. But opinions differ regarding the way in which this theological conception of the basic Christian hope is to be applied to the actual developments in communist countries. It is not possible here to survey all the different views but two may be cited.

C. Communism as a Judgment upon Pre-Communist Society

There is the view which holds that pre-communist society, because of its spiritual emptiness, its social and economic injustice, and its failure to meet the challenge of the rising masses, collapsed completely before the revolutionary force of communism. This collapse is regarded as evidence of the total judgment of God. The new economic and political society of communism is seen as the first step toward the classless society, which is a provisional hope which Christians also can affirm. Professor Hromadka of Czechoslovakia, who holds such a view, emphasizes that the prophetic response of the Christian to communism must not be a plain "No."

> We must meet . . . the challenge of Marxism and what it represents. First of all, we have to understand the real effort of the Marxists to reconstruct our social order, to raise the working class to a level of active participation in the shaping of human conditions, to establish a society in which all class differences and injustices would disappear. We must understand *why* it is precisely the Marxists who have taken over the historic role of socialising our countries. Moreover, Marxism is a special challenge to the Christian churches because it is being taken seriously by its followers, while Christians are largely guilty of having no burning convictions. Many churches have degenerated into empty conventions and institutions.[2]

[2] J. L. Hromadka in *The Ecumenical Review*, Oct., 1952, p. 57.

And a young Christian theologian in China writes:

> Many young Christian men and women are considering the ministry and church work as a way for them to serve God and the people. Today, Christian ministers are working within an environment of moral health and vigour. They can carry on their moral and spiritual tasks with consciences at peace because today they have the freedom to come all out for peace, democracy, liberty, human dignity and all those things which the Christian faith demands of a human community.[3]

Those Christians who believe that Christians must affirm the fundamental liberating forces in the communist social revolution emphasize the progress inherent in the social changes taking place in communist countries.

The Church, and each Christian, is called to participate in the building of the new society, to build up an atmosphere of trust between church and state, to prove that Christians are not imperialist or reactionary.[4] The Church must help explain and gain approval for the measures of socialization, and of the "battle for peace." Christians may not become ideological communists, but according to this view their place is in the mass organizations, perhaps even in the Party. The Christian tries at the same time to humanize the social revolution. He may protest or set right the incidental injustices of it. He must help all those in need. However, there may also come a time when, as Professor Hromadka has stated, the Church must say "No" to the state, "if someone tries to lead her away from God's authority and to subject her to a human authority."

D. Christian Resistance to Communist Ideology

Another viewpoint claims to base a thoroughly practical realism about the forces at work in the world on the Christian hope. It discerns the judgment of God on the old society and on the Church without making sweeping denunciations

[3] K. H. Ting in *China Monthly Review*, July, 1953.

[4] This view is expressed in a report for this Survey from the Ecumenical Study Commission of the Hungarian Churches.

of it, and without illusion as to the character of communism. It sees in communism the attempt of another total ideology, a false faith, to press human beings into its mold, and to wield total power in the world. According to this viewpoint, the task of the Christian is to analyze the forces of society in the knowledge that God in Christ is their Lord and judge, who has prescribed their true functions; to judge the policies of the government with sober empiricism, according to whether they serve the needs and preserve the freedoms of human beings; to act in whatever range God grants, in responsibility for one's neighbor in His Kingdom, without too much strategy, without too much hope for success or fear for the consequences. These are the logical consequences of the Christian hope. This viewpoint is well illustrated in a statement by a pastor in Eastern Germany:

> We have to learn how to accept the limitations of the position in which God has placed us, and to limit our responsibility to the tasks He gives us. Christians in different places and times have had different ranges of potential influence and knowledge. Ours is very small. We have a little power in our immediate surroundings, but very little. We must reckon with prison where we will have less. We have some understanding of the issues at stake in the world situation, but it is one-sided and scanty. We are tempted always to become impatient with these limits, to imagine that our power or our knowledge is greater than it is, and that therefore the total trend of society is our responsibility. . . . We are called to much more modest strategies and more direct responsibilities—to bear witness to the truth where we know it, to work for a bit of justice or humanity wherever a way opens, to know our Bible (and next to it our Marx-Leninism) better than the communists, in order that we can understand, love and help the people with whom we live.

For Christians who believe it is necessary to resist the communist ideology at specific points with spiritual power, four examples indicate the possibilities of social action:

(1) The very existence of the Church as a parish fellowship in love of free men bound to one another in Christ,

hearing and carrying the Word of God into their daily lives, is a social act. The Church is the only voluntary fellowship in society. Therefore, these Christians exercise and defend the broadest possible scope of church activity and privilege. Freedom not to register church meetings with the authorities, the right to own land, the right of religious instruction in the schools, all of which in a normal state would be matters for compromise, become here points on which the Christian stands against the state's total claim. The mutual confidence and love and the freedom from fear which grow in a church meeting or conference, the economic community based on free co-operation which can be built on church farmland as in Eastern Germany, and the witness which intelligent religious instruction can bear to all truth, are living challenges to mass organizations based on fear, forced economic planning and ideological education. For example, as a means of resisting the totalitarian claims of the state, the churches in communist countries have discovered the fruitfulness of Christian philanthropic, mission and social work, supported entirely by voluntary contributions from church members.

(2) Social action in this situation is also the Christian's personal encounter with his neighbor, backed by the counsel and support of the congregation and the pastor. The communist is thus encountered whenever a Christian refuses to participate in some mass demonstration—petition, parade, election, joining an organization, etc.—and has to answer for this refusal. He then has the opportunity to explain biblical commandments in their practical applications, and to draw communists out of their ideological shell. Other men are encountered in their bitter hatred against the regime, and need the Gospel of Christ if they are to go on living in this society.

The following account of conversations between Christians and Marxists in Eastern Germany is a good example of the way in which the Christian through his personal encounter with his neighbor bears witness to the power of God, and

helps his fellow sufferers and the victims of totalitarian ideology to rise above hate and resentment:

Two young communists are talking with us. They are trying to persuade us to take part in the voting for "peace." They make the usual statements about "peace." When they have finished, we begin to ask about the nature of their struggle for peace in relation to the teachings of Lenin. They say: "Peace means not a condition of peace between nations, but peace in the classless society, which will be achieved through revolution, the collapse of capitalist power and the dictatorship of the proletariat."

"So this plebiscite is directly connected with belief in the truth of scientific socialism?" "Oh, yes." "But you see, we don't believe that it is the truth!" It nearly takes one's breath away to see how the two react to this unexpected conclusion. "Then what have you got instead of this belief?" And so begins a three-hour talk about obedience to God's law, and other aspects of Christian faith. One of them, who is married, asks, "How can God be real if He has no substance? For nothing can exist without substance." "Is the love and confidence between himself and his wife real, and on the other hand can he prove that it has substance?" He agrees that his conception of what is real is inadequate, even for the relationships between people. He reflects and then puts a surprising question. "But supposing I am lying when I say that love and confidence are a reality between two people?" "Then your marriage must be a very unhappy one!" Then his human side comes to the fore. "You are right; life would be awful without that." We ask other questions: has Marxism any answer to the question, what is the death of the individual? Without it can there be an answer to the question, what is man? We men exist only as dying men. Has communism any answer to the reality of evil in us? When he took his leave he said, "I tell you frankly, that is my first encounter with the Christian faith. You have said things that I can't forget."

(3) The Christian can, so far as his knowledge goes, witness to a truth and an order in society which is based on the Kingdom of God. His faith makes him free from communist interpretations, to see scientific facts and human relations more clearly. Recognizing that God ordains political order

and justice and an economic system to serve the needs of men, he will co-operate with even a communist state when a practical useful task needs to be done. He will also be free to resist state power or evade it, when only by this means can he serve his neighbor or remind the state of its true function. The Church itself has resisted the state in East Germany on occasion, in official statements on land reform, on elections, on lying in propaganda and education, and the police threat behind it, and on attacks on the Church and its youth in 1953. There are centers of social influence such as socially necessary professions (doctors, engineers, science professors, etc.) which give opportunity for effective Christian witness, and even in the more controlled ones there are opportunities. Economic freedom from the state becomes, in this connection, a treasure to defend for its value to this witness.

(4) All Christian action in society in communist lands must reckon with the possibility of loss of employment, or imprisonment. The acceptance of this suffering as a vocation, when it comes, is a supreme act of responsible obedience. It breaks the hold of fear, which is the greatest single social illness in a communist state. Thus it makes creative action and truly objective thinking possible. It carries responsible society into the heart of a system which does not believe in an ultimate responsibility to God—into its prisons, courts and concentration camps. Even there the possibilities of Christian action are present. There are neighbors, and there is the power and grace of God.

VIII

CONCLUSION

In the light of this survey what are the most important social questions to be discussed by the churches meeting at Evanston? In approaching specific problems to what extent can the churches make use of previous ecumenical thinking about the Christian witness in society and to what extent must they discover new approaches? What old strategies for social action have proved most effective in various situations, and where do new channels need to be explored? With reference to the main theme of the Assembly how can the Christian hope be expressed in ways relevant to contemporary social issues? These are some of the questions raised by the survey which can be dealt with only in a summary way in this concluding section.

To the extent to which the Church has learned to accept its responsibility for the conditions of society, and to avoid identifying the Christian faith with particular economic and political institutions, it is possible to point to a great advance of Christian social thinking in the last twenty-five years and more particularly in the last ten years. Churches and Christian groups have made great progress in discovering the need for Christian witness in relation to the spiritual and moral issues in political and economic life and for expressing this concern in the language of social and political thought and action. It is also evident that the ecumenical movement has been instrumental in helping the churches to see their responsibility for society and to find the right means for expressing that concern. There is no considerable body of Christians who would challenge the conclusions of Section III at the Amsterdam Assembly, that the Christian churches should

avoid the identification of Christianity with any economic system, and that in relation to political and economic problems, "it is the responsibility of Christians to seek new, creative solutions which never allow either justice or freedom to destroy the other."

Nevertheless, it is apparent that there is also great apathy and indifference in the Church concerning social issues. Everywhere the churches have much to do to demonstrate to the world that the Christian faith "delivers us from enslavement to worldly projects and institutions" and also "summons us to responsible action in God's own service in and for the world." On the basis of the scanty information which has been received it is not possible to speak precisely about the cause of this apathy but three factors play an important role in almost every country.

(1) *The Lack of a Vital Faith*: there is a need in many countries for a renewal of faith, for new theological insights regarding the spiritual dangers in modern society. Christians are not prepared to interpret the great social catastrophes of our time and cannot help peoples who are "overwhelmed by them and perish spiritually in their confusion." The Christian concern for social renewal which is evident in some countries today is due not only to the challenge of social conditions but is based on a discovery of theological insights and a quickening of faith.

(2) *The New Social Situation in Most Countries*: it is clear that in the years since World War II, changes have crystallized in economic and political life which confront us with quite new problems in Christian social thinking. *Laissez-faire* capitalism, communism and socialism are outdated categories in most countries. In many countries people have found ways around these extremes and the social issues they are facing are more subtle and complex than in the past, therefore new approaches are required. In some countries, patience and a sacrificial spirit are required while new economic and political systems are developed. In other countries great imagi-

nation is needed to discard traditional approaches and to visualize entirely new relationships at every level of community life.

(3) *The World Dimensions of Social Problems*: the great disparity and the bewildering variety of social problems today baffles and confuses many people who have lived and still do live in conditions of relative stability and security. Half the world is in a state of complete social revolution and the other half in a condition of rapid social evolution. The different degrees and stages of social change taking place make it difficult to pinpoint the common social issues for ecumenical discussion. Moreover, it is now impossible to speak about the meaning of the responsible society in any country without considering world needs. It is this interdependence of the local, the regional, and the world needs and issues which makes for a great feeling of impotence and irresponsibility and which baffles many churches.

Tasks for the Churches

This description of the new situation suggests certain tasks which the churches everywhere must take seriously:

(1) *Developing Common Convictions Regarding the Structure of Political and Economic Life.* Christians can express their solidarity in the world through their common witness on political and economic issues. But to make this possible Christians must think together more than they have done in the past about their convictions concerning the structure of political institutions, the function of the state in economic life, the goals of economic life, and the Christian criteria for measuring the desirability of social policy at many levels. To speak about the Responsible Society in a World Perspective means not only to develop schemes for economic and political co-operation but a common ethos, common convictions concerning the destiny of man and his relation to society. The churches have much to do to fulfill this responsibility in relation to the many new conflicts and divisions about the right pattern of economic and political life.

(2) *The Role of the Church in Society.* The churches have perhaps too often been guilty of supposing that all that was required of them was to develop certain positions on social issues and then to use conventional means for making these positions known and to engage in certain remedial social work. With the increasing complexity of social problems and social structures in the world, it is becoming clear that the churches need to re-examine the ways in which they have tried to deal with social issues in the past. They need also to look carefully at the nature of the political and economic forces with which they have to deal, and to try to determine how their convictions can best be translated into responsible influence on public opinion and public policy. The pursuit of this responsibility will require expert knowledge, imagination and the determination to hold in balance the Church's calling to minister with effectiveness as well as with good intention in the world, and at the same time to remain loyal to its witness to the truth which is not of the world.

(3) *Demonstrating the Basis of Our Hope.* It is clear that the world needs not only more freedom, security, justice and the social and economic institutions for realizing them, but the faith which gives these terms meaning and which gives people hope in the midst of overwhelming evil and widespread despair. Where will the churches find the spiritual resources which will enable them to interpret this hope as the real answer for men without hope? In this connection, this survey suggests that the churches around the world have much to learn from the experiences of Christians in communist countries who have discovered what it means to live by the ultimate hope in Jesus Christ, and who have also discovered the powerful help from the Holy Spirit which comes to those who fearlessly proclaim the will of God.

(4) *The Responsibility of the Churches and the Social Revolution in the Underdeveloped Countries.* Perhaps the most important single social problem confronting the churches today is their task in relation to the economically and tech-

nically underdeveloped countries. It was said in the Second Report of the Commission on the Main Theme for the Second Assembly that:

> We cannot worthily proclaim to men the Gospel of the resurrection of the body to eternal life, unless we are at the same time ready to rush to their help in every predicament of body as well as of soul even to the sacrifice of our own lives. The cry of half the world's people in the present day for bread enough to sustain life in their bodies must be heard by the Christian as the cry of Christ. He who spoke the parables of the Last Judgment and of Dives and Lazarus will surely not leave us without condemnation if we are content to eat sumptuously while millions starve.

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on

SOCIAL QUESTIONS—THE RESPONSIBLE SOCIETY IN A WORLD PERSPECTIVE

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